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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER IR IZ
SUBJECT: BAGHDAD BATTENING DOWN, TENSIONS SIMMER

Classified By: Political Counselor Matthew H. Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Iraqi contacts of various Mission elements report that Baghdad's neighborhoods were generally quiet March 28, with most residents staying at home due to a combination of the GOI-imposed 24-hour curfew, JAM intimidation, and the typical Friday closure of businesses and schools. JAM remained in control of the Shia neighborhoods it took by force over the course of the past five days, located chiefly in the districts of Sadr City, 9 Nissan, Kadhamiya, northern Adhamiya, and western Rashid. Several sources reported that JAM distributed leaflets door-to-door today in those neighborhoods, instructing residents to stay indoors or be killed. Locals criticized the Iraqi Police (IP) response to JAM intimidation as ineffective and cowardly, with several reporting that they witnessed IP riding around with JAM members.

¶2. (S) Deputy Baghdad Governor Qassim N'Ima al-Durraji warned PRTOFFs March 28 that while there may still be room for negotiation, the security situation in Baghdad has the potential to spin out of control. Durraji, an "old school Sadrist" with political connections to the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) and familial ties to the Sadr clan, explained that Moqtada al-Sadr (MAS) is under a lot of pressure from senior Sadrist leaders who feel that the MAS-declared freeze has weakened the Sadrist vis--vis the GOI and ISCI/Badr. Durraji said that the GOI went too far with their military operations in Najaf, Kut and now Basrah.

¶3. (S) Sheikh Shia al Faraji of Sadr City told EPRT 3 Team Leader March 28 that Sadr City OMS has created a special military branch of JAM called the "golden" group, whose job is to rein in and capture the outlaw JAM elements currently wreaking havoc. Faraji also reported that several key Sadr City tribal leaders met March 27 with Sadr City OMS leader Salman Al Faraji and received permission to meet with a representative from the GoI to discuss the current conflict. (NOTE: These tribal leaders include representatives of the population that migrated to Sadr City from southern Iraq, and may maintain tribal ties there. END NOTE.) The tribal leaders planned to meet with the Prime Minister's Advisor Sadiq al Rikadi in order to raise their objections regarding GOI targeting of Sadrist and its treatment of Sadr City. They planned to suggest that the tribal leaders act as mediators between the GOI and the Sadrist. The Sadrist then suddenly cancelled the meeting that they had earlier sanctioned, after the Sadr City OMS office received instructions that no contact with the GOI would be permissible until the Prime Minister ceased operations in Basrah.

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